

Message

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East Chicago press clips

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NWI Times - Visclosky hears Superfund residents' concerns

Group urging Superfund residents to get basements tested

Residents demand help from Mayor in lead tainted East Chicago

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/visclosky-hears-superfund-residents-concerns/article_644fa59e-6832-54e2-88b3-617511c3447e.html

Visclosky hears Superfund residents' concerns

- [Sarah Reese sarah.reese@nwi.com](mailto:sarah.reese@nwi.com), (219) 933-3351
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- EAST CHICAGO — U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, met Sunday with more than a dozen residents living in the USS Lead Superfund site, who said they're afraid the current cleanup won't fully address contamination and are frustrated by the lack of a cohesive response by various government officials.

Visclosky said he understood their frustrations, asked some of them to document their concerns for his office and planned to contact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. However, he told the group assembled in zone 3 resident Maritza Lopez's back room he couldn't make any promises.

Rosa Maria Rodriguez, a member of We the People of East Chicago, said residents are concerned because Mayor Anthony Copeland is seeking \$8 million in funding to demolish the West Calumet Housing Complex when many of the residents' health and safety needs have not been met.

"That is putting the cart before the horse," she said.

Visclosky said he and several other elected officials are all searching for funding for various purposes and that their efforts are concurrent, not consecutive.

"There is no demolition if you are not properly relocated, you don't have proper housing," the congressman said.

Residents circulated a document about how a Montana community received Medicaid for life because of an environmental problem and told Visclosky people from all three cleanup zones in East Chicago should receive similar benefits. They described a range of health issues, including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, developmental disabilities, cancer, immune disorders, miscarriages, premature births, chronic respiratory, ear and stomach problems and more.

Resident Sara Jimenez and several others said the Calumet neighborhood, which includes three residential cleanup zones, should be declared a disaster area, in part, so more federal resources can be made available to people affected by falling property values.

"I really feel this area should be declared a disaster. Because, you know what, the findings are just going to get deeper and deeper," she said. "We're involved. We're getting our paperwork. We're looking into everything. We have enough people here to gather all the data that we need, you know, to let them know that we know what's going on, and you're not going to pull the wool over our eyes."

Ray Mosley, a resident of zone 3, asked if Visclosky would help them seek a disaster declaration. The congressman later assured the group that being declared a Superfund site makes many resources available to them.

Mosley said EPA excavated his property several years ago, but now plans to return in the spring. Several residents said they fear the agency's piecemeal approach to excavation will lead to re-contamination.

Michael Jacobi, a zone 3 resident, said EPA didn't plan to excavate his property this year but agreed to do so after he pressured the agency. His wife is pregnant, he said.

The level of contamination in indoor dust samples from his home were higher than levels found in the soil outside, he said. That was the same case for Mary Poe, who didn't attend the meeting but said last week the level of lead in her basement was nearly twice as high as in her soil.

Akeesha Daniels, of the West Calumet Housing Complex, said the EPA cleaned the inside of her home, and she reluctantly moved back in five days afterward because she has not yet found another home.

"No one has been back to retest," she said, adding her children began to fall ill shortly after they returned. "They should never have let us come back."

Visclosky said several West Calumet Housing Complex residents' complaints about a chaotic relocation process were "loud and clear." He also said he wants to hear from any homeowner having problems with their mortgage lenders because of the contamination.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/group-urging-superfund-residents-to-get-basements-tested/article_b6369450-c909-5822-ae9e-a327dcb1852d.html

Group urging Superfund residents to get basements tested

- Sarah Reese sarah.reese@nwi.com, (219) 933-3351

Residents living in East Chicago's USS Lead Superfund site are raising the alarm following the discovery that the level of lead in one resident's basement exceeded the level in the soil outside her home.

Mary Poe, who lives in the easternmost of three residential cleanup zones in the Calumet neighborhood, said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently told her the lead concentration of dust in her basement was about 500 parts per million. That number is higher than the EPA's indoor dust screening level of 316 ppm and the lead concentration of 260 ppm found in the first zero to 6 inches of soil in her backyard.

Poe said she subsequently received another call from the EPA about the level of arsenic in the basement dust, but she was so upset she didn't ask what the concentration was. She's awaiting a letter from EPA with all of the basement sampling results.

"Even though they're going to clean it up, I still won't feel safe in my house," Poe said.

When asked what the significance of Poe's result was, EPA said it does not comment on results for individual residents. The agency recommended all residents in zones 1, 2 and 3 take precautions to reduce exposure to lead dust and dirt, including cleaning homes, removing shoes before walking indoors, regularly washing hands and changing furnace filters.

Poe moved into the home in the 4900 block of Euclid Street in 1993 and began experiencing symptoms of an immune disorder that mimics arthritis in 1997. She was diagnosed with Sjogren's syndrome in 1999, she said. She said recent blood tests came back normal, but she plans to contact her doctor about having her liver and kidney screened.

EPA excavated the soil in her yard in October because of arsenic levels, not lead. The 260 ppm found in her backyard is below the EPA's 400 ppm residential standard, which has been criticized for being too high.

After learning of the results, she contacted the recently formed Community Advisory Group and asked spokeswoman Maritza Lopez to tell others to make sure they get their basements tested.

Lopez has been working to spread the word that all residents should ask EPA to test their basements, especially those whose properties are being excavated. Residents from all three zones can bring concerns to the next CAG meeting, which is set for 2 to 4 p.m. today at the Pastrick branch of the East Chicago Library on Chicago Avenue.

EPA agreed to test basements as part of a pilot study after residents raised concerns that seepage during rains and flooding may have carried contaminants into their homes. An EPA document related to the nearby DuPont cleanup site says groundwater in part of the neighborhood runs north toward Riley Park.

The DuPont East Chicago facility at 5215 Kennedy Ave., which is east of the former USS Lead facility and south of 149th Place, manufactured lead arsenate insecticide from 1910 to 1949. Cleanup at the DuPont site is ongoing under the Environmental Protection Agency's Resource Conservation and Recovery Act program, and DuPont agreed to a \$26 million settlement in 2014 for cleanup at the USS Lead site.

EPA said Friday it has sampled dust in seven basements and has validated results for six of them. Of the six, three exceeded arsenic standards and one exceeded lead standards. EPA said it will meet with residents on a case-by-case basis to address potential cleaning.

Excavation of soil in zones 2 and 3, where Poe lives, also is ongoing. As of Thursday, 12 properties in zone 2 and 38 properties in zone 3 had either been excavated or were in progress, the agency said.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/residents-demand-help-from-mayor-in-lead-tainted-east-chicago/article_9ae2b3a4-4409-5639-ad72-0413bcfa91ba.html

Residents demand help from Mayor in lead tainted East Chicago

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Updated: November 21, 2016 @ 7:35 am

EAST CHICAGO — Mayor Anthony Copeland has largely been absent from the public's eye since news first broke this summer that sections of the city were polluted with dangerously high levels of lead and arsenic.

That hasn't gone unnoticed by the more than 1,000 displaced families at the West Calumet Housing Complex or hundreds of homeowners who live on contaminated soil.

On Friday, enough was enough for the citizens who marched into the city's administration building with a list of demands to hand Copeland. Instead, they were met with a front desk shielded by glass and a secretary telling them the mayor wasn't there.

"He's clearly here," Sheilah Garland, a political organizer with National Nurses United who helped organize Friday's demonstration, said later.

About three dozen East Chicago residents and activists filled into the building's front lobby, chanting things like: "Which side are you on, Mayor Copeland? Which side are you on?" and "Bring out the mayor!"

Copeland never appeared, but residents say they are not going away.

'What more data do you need?'

The USS Lead Superfund site was first designated by the EPA in 2009, but soil testing in the area began decades ago. Two lead smelter operations also once operated on the site of the public housing complex and the school.

"Those corporations have made their profits and they're gone. And we have a city administration that is hiding behind closed doors, won't meet with his residents, and making decisions that impact our lives," Garland said outside city hall at an earlier press conference.

Among the demands are for Copeland to appeal to FEMA to declare the Superfund site an emergency disaster area as officials did for lead-tainted Flint, Michigan. The demand was made a few weeks ago, Garland said.

"And he refused to do so. He said he needed more data. What more data do you need?" Garland said.

They also want the \$8 million the city recently requested from the federal government for demolition of West Calumet to be diverted to guarantee the needs of families are met.

They have demanded relocation assistance for homeowners in the Superfund site faced with depreciated home values, and an assessment of all households to determine support services for all people with disabilities and vulnerable residents, including seniors.

Copeland previously has said he wasn't aware of the full magnitude of the problem until the EPA handed over soil data this May.

'Come out and say something'

City Attorney Carla Morgan said Friday she couldn't speak to why the mayor wouldn't meet with residents or why he hasn't been in the community.

"They may not see us on the ground, but (the health department) is doing testing because we pushed for it," Morgan said, adding the mayor has met with residents at his office in recent weeks.

Akeesha Daniels, a mother of three, said Copeland could do more to help the constituents for whom he was elected to serve.

"I feel like Mayor Copeland should come out and say something ... because we need to know what are his next steps that him and the city are going to do to make it better for me and my kids," Daniels said.

Sincerely,

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